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DEPT. FOR NEA/IPA AND NEA/PPD
DEPT. ALSO FOR IIP/CTCC JAMES VAN DE VELDE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2032

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SUBJECT: POST RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR IDENTIFICATION OF
"CREDIBLE MUSLIM VOICES"

REF: STATE 122288

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (c).

¶1. (SBU) In response to the Department's request to identify "credible voices" in the Muslim community who reject extremist interpretations of Islam (reftel), post submits the following three names for consideration:

A) SHEIKH ABDELLAH NIMER DARWISH (born 1948):

Sheikh Darwish is the founder of the Islamic Movement in Israel and currently heads its southern branch. (Note: The southern branch represents the original, moderate movement founded by Sheikh Darwish, while the northern branch -- under the controversial Sheikh Ra'ed Salah -- represents a more extremist splinter movement with ideological ties to Hamas.) Sheikh Darwish is also Director of the Adam Center for Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue in Kfar Kassem, Israel. As head of the Adam Center, he works closely with numerous leaders in the Jewish and Christian communities of Israel. In cooperation with the Mosaica Center for Religion, State and Society in Israel (founded by Rabbi Michael Melchior), Sheikh Darwish leads and participates in numerous interfaith activities in Israel and abroad, including the Alexandria Process of dialogue between religious leaders in the Holy Land. Sheikh Darwish is currently positioning the Adam Center to serve as a bridge between the Jewish-Israeli world and the wider Arab-Muslim world. Sheikh Darwish studied Islamic law in Hebron.

Sheikh Darwish's Islamic Movement (southern branch) is also represented in the Knesset by the Ra'am-Ta'al party and its four Knesset members. While Sheikh Darwish does not have any direct role in the operations or policies of the Ra'am-Ta'al party, his influence as the spiritual leader of the party's founding movement is notable.

B) CHIEF QADI AHMAD NATOUR (born 1952)

Chief Qadi Natour is President of Israel's Muslim (Shari'a) High Court of Appeal and President (since 1994) of the Israeli committee to authorize Shari'a lawyers. He received a BA in Islamic Studies from Hebrew University and a BA in Law from Tel Aviv University. He also holds a Master's in Media and Journalism from Hebrew University. Chief Qadi Natour is currently on the faculties of Tel Aviv University and American University in Washington, D.C., where he specializes in the teaching of Islamic traditions for conflict resolution. He is a member of the Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace and the Board of World Religious Leaders. In 1999, he was awarded the Interfaith Gold Medallion by the International Council of Christians and Jews.

Chief Qadi Natour participated in the State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program in 1991.

C) SHEIKH ZIAD ABU-MUCH (born c. 1960s)

Sheikh Abu-Much founded Israel's first Islamic College (now the Al-Qasemi Islamic College) in the Israeli-Arab town of Baka al-Gharbiya. The college, which he ran for eleven years prior to his departure in 1989, has developed a reputation for encouraging critical thought and upholding pluralistic values. The college, with a student body comprised mostly of women, operates ongoing programs on conflict resolution and inter-religious/inter-cultural dialogue.

Following his departure from Al-Qasemi, Sheikh Abu-Much served as Director for Professional Advising for Muslim clergy at the Interior Ministry. In 2007 he was named Director of the Muslim Communities Department in the Religious Affairs Division of the Interior Ministry. Sheikh Abu-Much is active in various interfaith efforts and is a regular participant in interfaith conferences and seminars.

12. (S) The three Muslim leaders described here are articulate and share a track record of speaking out in defense of a moderate, tolerant, and inclusive view of Sunni Islam. They are likely to continue their efforts to promote tolerance and mutual understanding, especially in the charged environment of Muslim-Jewish relations in Israel. Their relations with the wider Arab-Muslim world are complicated, however, by their Israeli citizenship. Their influence as "credible Muslim voices" is unlikely to extend beyond the unique Israeli context.

13. (S) All three are well-known to the Embassy and are regularly invited to Embassy-sponsored events. We are not

aware of any issues -- ideological or otherwise -- that would preclude collaboration with these individuals.

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JONES